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Wellness Through Answers News

July/August 2020

*Linking Connecticut Patients, Families, and Residents to
Reliable Health Information*

Have a Personal Health Question?

Wellness Through Answers staff can help you find answers. Our medical librarians research personal health questions for Connecticut residents. Our service is free and confidential. Call or email us with your question: (860) 679-4055 / hnet@uchc.edu

Your COVID-19 Questions Answered

Do you have problems sorting through the accuracy or completeness of stories about COVID-19? A team of researchers from Brown, Harvard, MIT, and Massachusetts General Hospital created a website, "**COVID Explained**," to

give you the facts you need to protect you and your family. The team answers commonly-asked questions like- Is it safe to go to the gym or eat out? What can I do about daycare? How do I use gloves properly? The site also has in-depth articles on topics including testing, immunity, vaccines, treatments, racial disparities, and more.

Want to Participate in a COVID-19 Vaccine Trial?

The [COVID-19 Prevention Network \(COVPN\)](#), created by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, is recruiting people 18 and older for [Phase III trials](#) testing the effectiveness of vaccines and monoclonal antibody treatments. Interested adults must first complete a short online survey that asks some personal questions. Your information is then sent to the closest trial location. If you are considered a good candidate, a trial recruiter will reach out to you. You may be paid for your participation, but you will not be asked for personal financial information or identification. The COVPN website has a [link to the survey](#), as well as information about what to expect, the science of vaccines and monoclonal antibodies, and [frequently asked questions](#).

COVID-19 Information for Non-English Speakers

Does your community include people who don't speak or understand English? How can you communicate important health information about COVID-19 to non-English speakers? Where do you begin? Beyond your local health department, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and the [World Health Organization](#) are good places to start. Other sites include:

- [COVID-19 Health Literacy Project](#) - handouts in 35 languages
- [ethnoMED](#) - medical and cultural information for immigrants and refugees
- [Health Reach](#) - print, video, and audio information in multiple languages
- [Doctors of the World](#) - advice for patients in 45 languages.

Bias and Healthcare

The US healthcare system does not treat all consumers the same. Access to quality healthcare is affected by race, income level, religious beliefs, sex, and gender identification. [Bias also exists](#) in how patients treat doctors, nurses, and other healthcare workers caring for them. Patients and family members may use racial slurs, make derogatory jokes, or demand to be seen by another

health professional. Few hospitals have **guidelines or formal policies** for responding to patient bias.

COVID-19 has created opportunities to address and remedy healthcare bias. The latest issue of The Annals of Internal Medicine offers a **blueprint** for developing and implementing a formal, institution-wide program to deal with bias against healthcare professionals and trainees.

Surgical Assistants and Surprise Medical Bills

Surgical assistants (SAs) are like a second pair of hands for the surgeon. SAs assist with technical functions that help the surgeon safely carry out the operation. The majority of SAs are hospital employees. However, **25% of SAs work for third-party contractors** because they can charge more for their services.

Why should you be concerned about SAs? Patients can choose a surgeon and hospital that are covered by their insurance. Patients, however, may not be informed that a SA will be part of their team. If that SA is not in the insurance company's network, the patient will receive a surprise medical bill from them.

State-regulated insurance plans **protect their insureds** from surprise medical bills. Patients covered by self-funded employer health plans, however, are not protected. Kaiser Health estimates that **61% of employees** participate in self-funded plans.

A World Tour of Health Care Systems

A new Commonwealth Fund **report** takes an in-depth look at health care systems in 20 countries, including the United States. Each country profile describes the government's role, how health care systems are structured and funded, who and what is covered, quality assurance, preventing disparities, and coordination of care. The **Commonwealth Fund** is a nonprofit health policy research institute.

A New Approach to Rating Hospitals

Consumers choose hospitals differently. Some consumers focus on patient safety measures like surgical outcomes, infection rates, or length-of-stay.

Others care about the value of care provided. Still, others focus on community involvement.

A new hospital rating tool allows consumers to compare hospitals based on what's important to them. Using the Lown Institutes' Hospital Index, consumers can select performance measures from three broad categories: "Patient Outcomes," "Civic Leadership," and "Value of Care." Consumers can download their search results to a spreadsheet for easier comparison. The Lown Index ranks 3280 hospitals nationally.

Bias in Care of Dermatology Patients

What does the COVID-19 skin rash look like if your patient is not white? Images of darker-skinned patients with rare or common skin conditions are hard to find in textbooks and on the internet. Skin conditions like eczema or melanoma look very different on light and dark skin. As a result, dark-skinned patients may be misdiagnosed and not treated appropriately.

Options for dark-skinned patients are starting to improve. Susan Taylor, a pioneer in the push for better care for patients with dark skin, opened the first "Skin of Color Center" at Mt Sinai Hospital in New York. She also founded the "Skin of Color Society," which maintains a database of dermatologists experienced in treating dark-skinned individuals.

Racially-Biased Algorithms Guide Medical Care

Algorithms are computerized decision-making tools that guide patient care. A new study found algorithms used by medical specialists were biased in favor of white patients and resulted in African Americans receiving inferior care. As a result, African Americans were denied life-saving treatments for heart failure, chest surgery, kidney failure, kidney donation, childbirth, breast cancer, and kidney stones.

Important Conversations with Older Adults

How can you avoid conflict when talking to older family members about sensitive issues like personal finance or legal representation? Difficult conversations can be productive when you understand your family member's communication style, as well as your own.

The Institute on Aging offers a free "[Communication Style Quiz](#)" for caregivers and their older adults. The quiz is not a psychological assessment but serves as a guideline for communicating effectively with others.

Your family member may want you to get to the point quickly or take time to share feelings first. When you understand how you and your adult prefer to communicate, your conversations can be more respectful and successful.

Video Game Prescribed for Children with ADHD

Encouraging children with attention deficit disorder (ADD or ADHD) to play video games might seem to be a bad idea. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), however, just approved [EndeavorRx](#), a video game device to treat ADD symptoms in children aged 8 - 12. The FDA based their approval on results from five studies involving 600 children. The most convincing study reported a [36% improvement](#) in at least one objective measure of attention. This study, however, had shortcomings. It followed children for only one month and was run by physicians who had [a financial stake](#) in the company that makes EndeavorRx. The study's authors also admitted that EndeavorRx [should not replace](#) existing ADD treatments. The FDA announced that the video game "[is intended to be used](#) as part of a treatment program that may include clinician-directed therapy, medication, and/or educational programs." Side effects of EndeavorRx included headaches, dizziness, frustration, and aggression.

More News You Can Use

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Which [COVID-19 statistics](#) are important?

Data visualization experts explain [how to read common](#) COVID-19 graphs

Google Maps gets [new features](#) for Coronavirus

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